

## HMS BOUNTY: Lots Of Answers Now

Written by Charles Doane  
Thursday, 21 February 2013 23:25

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LIVE TESTIMONY at the [U.S. Coast Guard hearings](#) into the loss of HMS *Bounty* is wrapping up this week. That and the recent publication of an excellent investigative story in *Outside* magazine at last make it possible to hazard some answers to the [questions that have been nagging me](#) about the tall ship's [tragic demise in Hurricane Sandy](#) last October. What seems painfully clear is that *Bounty*'s skipper, Robin Walbridge, bears much of the responsibility for what happened. In that he died with his ship, he has paid a steep price for his culpability. But still he has escaped having to answer to the family of crew member Claudene Christian, who was also lost with the ship, and to the other *Bounty* crew members whose lives he endangered. Something about that pisses me off. But at the same time, as skipper of a bluewater boat who is sometimes responsible for the lives of others, I cannot help but sympathize with the man.

If you are salivating for gory details, I urge you to read all of Mario Vittone's [excellent coverage of the hearings](#) at the [gCaptain website](#). You should also, of course, read the [Outside story by Kathryn Miles](#). For you lazy sods who can't be bothered, here's the Reader's Digest condensed version.

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*The hearings were led by Commander Kevin Carroll (on the left, representing the U.S. Coast Guard) and Capt. Rob Jones (on the right, representing the National Transportation Safety Board)*

**Did Anyone Involved With HMS Bounty Question Walbridge's Decision to Leave New London And Sail Into the Storm?** Yes! Thank God. First mate John Svendsen has testified that the crew had expressed concerns about sailing into the storm, and that he raised the issue with his skipper, suggesting instead that it might be wise to moor the ship upriver. Walbridge, however, insisted on heading out, but first held a crew meeting and invited anyone who wanted to leave the ship. No one elected to do so.

**Why Was HMS Bounty Leaking So Much?** *Bounty*, it turns out, always had a reputation for being a very wet ship. Crew members, in fact, sometimes referred to her as *Bondo Bounty*, as she always needed patching. Lying at a dock she needed pumping several times a day. While underway in calm conditions she needed pumping every four hours; in rough weather she needed pumping every one or two hours. During her last voyage she was being pumped out constantly. The common practice aboard *Bounty*, which was specifically sanctioned by Capt. Walbridge, was to caulk seams on the ship with common household sealants rather than more expensive marine sealants. The ship's bottom also had many lead patches that were sealed with roofing tar.

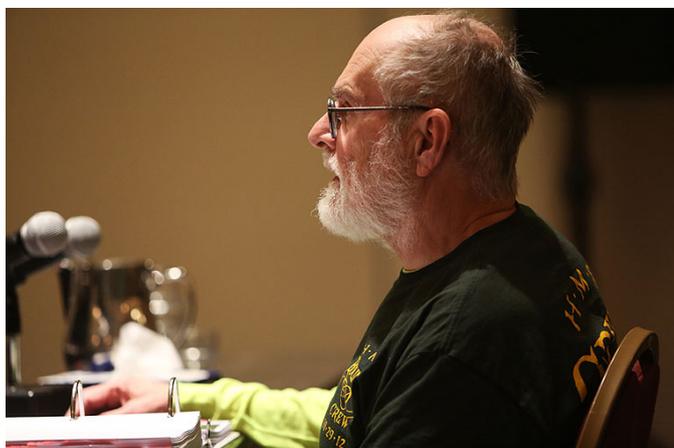
**What About That Work That Was Done in Boothbay Just Before She Sailed?** Todd Kosakowski, the project manager at [Boothbay Harbor Shipyard](#) who supervised work done on *Bounty* shortly before she sailed into Sandy, has testified that he and his crew found many rotted frames on the ship while working on her. He estimated 75 percent of the framing above the waterline was rotten and so informed Capt. Walbridge. He claims Walbridge instructed him to stop searching for rotten wood and promised that full repairs would be made prior the ship's next Coast Guard inspection. Kosakowski also testified that he told Walbridge "he

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had to pick and choose his weather" when taking the ship to sea.

**What About The Bilge Pumps?** According to testimony at the hearings, *Bounty* had five pumps aboard: two electric pumps, two hydraulic pumps, and one portable gasoline-fueled trash pump. Only the electric pumps were used routinely; the other pumps, per Capt. Walbridge's instructions, were not regularly exercised or maintained, as he was concerned about "wearing them out." As the crew struggled to keep *Bounty* afloat during the storm in October, the hydraulic pumps first had to be serviced before they could be used. The gas pump could not be started. One crew member, Douglass Faunt, testified that prior to setting off into the storm he notified Walbridge that the electric pumps were not operating at full capacity. Faunt claims Walbridge, to his knowledge, did nothing to investigate the cause of the problem.



*Douglass Faunt, the ship's electrician and radio operator, testifying at the hearings. He also claimed the ship's HF radio and INMARSAT C system were not routinely tested and could not be operated during Bounty's last voyage (Photo by Steve Earley)*

**What About The Engines And Generators?** Good question. The ship's engineer, Chris Barksdale, who had just joined the ship before it left New London, testified he could find no maintenance records for the equipment he was responsible for running. He changed the Racor filters before leaving New London and hoped for the best.

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*Barksdale during his testimony. He had never worked on a ship like Bounty before (Photo by Steve Earley)*

**Why Was It So Important To Get To Florida?** The answer to this is still uncertain, but it seems (check the *Outside* story for details) that Capt. Walbridge, who had been struggling for nearly 20 years to keep *Bounty* going on a shoestring budget, was very invested in nurturing a new relationship with the [Ashley DeRamus Foundation](#), which was interested in using the ship as an educational platform for people with special needs and allegedly was prepared to help raise money to maintain the ship. *Bounty* had a date set for an event involving the foundation on the weekend of November 9 in St. Petersburg.



*Capt. Robin Walbridge at the wheel of HMS Bounty. He was devoted to his ship and--ironically--was determined to keep her going at all costs*

**What About The Ship's Owner?** Robert Hansen, *Bounty's* owner, who was trying to sell her when she sank, has asserted his Fifth Amendment rights and refused to testify at the hearings.

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**Update:** If you prefer to absorb info via viddy, you can watch all the local WAVY TV news reports on the CG hearings [on YouTube right here](#).